

You Have A Choice!

Quality Child Care Tips
& Licensed Care Information
for Washington State
2004

Know your options when choosing child care – few choices matter more.

CHOOSING CHILD CARE

Choosing child care can be a nerve-wracking process. Many parents feel overwhelmed by the wide range of options. Others feel uneasy about placing a child in care outside the home. Many aren't sure where to look for helpful information. All of these competing emotions can make a difficult choice even harder. There is an easier way. Following the simple steps outlined below will make choosing child care easier.

Know the landscape

There are many different types of child care, from small, family-like settings to large centers. Child care settings offer care to children of various ages and individual needs. Caregivers have a wide variety of experience, training, and skills. Also, each caregiver's personality strongly affects the kind of care your child will receive.

Some types of child care are for:

- Babies and toddlers
- Preschool children
- School-aged children
- Parents who work evenings
- Delivering special curricula, such as Montessori, or religious-oriented instruction.

Know that your "parenting style" matters

Take a close look at your values and parenting style. It's important that your child's caregiver shares and respects your values and will reinforce the things you think are important. Some parents have strong feelings about: religion, nutrition, discipline, toilet training, naps, sex-role stereotyping, language, and ethnic and cultural heritage.

The more you and your caregiver agree on topics like these, the more comfortable your child is likely to be, and the more likely you are to be satisfied with the caregiver.

Follow these six steps

1. Start looking as far in advance as you can. Finding the right child care setting takes time.
2. Call the Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Center toll-free line at 1-800-424-2246. You'll be referred to a local contact person who can answer questions about how to choose care. You also can learn about licensed providers in your area, how to get information on complaints and licensing violations, and any financial assistance programs available to your family, if you qualify.
3. After you get the names of several care providers, visit these sites.
4. Ask questions.
5. Be confident when you make your selection.
6. Stay involved.

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Research proves it – Quality care is key to brain development of young children

Thanks to new technologies, scientists now have a much clearer picture of the brain's inner workings – how it learns and grows. Babies' brains grow and develop every day. Important new discoveries have found a child's earliest experiences and relationships affect the way his or her brain is organized. During the early years of life, the brain is forming connections that may determine a lifetime of skills and potentials. Quality care of young children is key.

Some of the findings confirm what parents and caregivers already know – that how the child is raised has an enormous impact on his emotional well being, intellectual level and skills for success. Scientists are learning about the neurological processes that support

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Can I get help paying for child care?

Working Connections Child Care is a state program that helps families with children pay for child care while they work, look for work or are in state-approved training. Families with incomes under 200 percent of the Federal

Poverty Level qualify. For a family of three, that's a monthly income of about \$2,500. Parents who receive a subsidy are required to help pay for child care services with a co-payment of at least \$15 a month, depending on family size and income. For example, a single parent with two children earning \$1,500 per month pays a

\$50 co-payment. Another family of three earning \$2,000 a month would have a copay of \$140.

For more information, go to the Working Connections Child Care website at:

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/carechoices>
or call your local community services office.





Quality care is key *(Continued)*

and go beyond this understanding. Research is showing that experiences, coupled with heredity, literally sculpt the brain!

However, for optimal development, timing is critical. There are periods of opportunity, “prime times ” during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific types of learning. In the first decade of life, the brain’s ability to grow, change and compensate is especially remarkable. (See chart.)

During this time, networks are forming at an astonishing rate – by age three, the weight of a child’s brain has almost tripled! The

young brain is like a super sponge, absorbing every experience into its neural architecture. During these first three years the brain is storing information and memories that will be the foundation for a lifetime of skills and potential. If this foundation is flawed, it can affect the entire life span of the individual.

Early care provides the experiences that have decisive and long lasting effects on the emotional, social, behavioral, intellectual and physical capabilities of the child for the rest of her life.

We can most effectively impact and influence a child’s brain development during the first three years of life.

Learn more about the influence of child care experiences on brain development by clicking on Brain Net at www1.dshs.wa.gov/carechoices

STAGES OF OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT									
Prenatal	Birth	1 Yr.	2 Yrs.	3 Yrs.	4 Yrs.	5 Yrs.	6 Yrs.	7-10 Yrs.	11-23 Yrs.
Motor Development									
Fine Motor									
Vision									
Basic Vocabulary									
Second Language									
Music Performance									
Math and Logic									
Social Attachment									
Emotional Control									

Who licenses child care providers?

The Division of Child Care and Early Learning oversees licensing child care providers and provides a focal point in state government for early learning awareness. The Division was formed in July 2001, bringing together staff from the Department of Health, the former Office of Child Care Policy, the Head Start/ECEAP Collaboration Project, and the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) headquarters policy section. Headquarters staff were co-located in the same building in October 2001. A major goal of the change was to provide seamless, coordinated child care services to families and child care providers.

Learn more about child care licensing at www1.dshs.wa.gov/carechoices Please click on Licensing Information.

Steps for healthy brain development in infants – birth to 12 months

Play

- Listen for sounds in the world around you.
- Point to the objects and imitate sound.
- Make eye contact with your baby while making silly faces.

Read

- Read to your baby. It’s never too early to start.
- Point out familiar objects when reading.

Talk

- Talk to your baby. Use different tones of your voice: high, low, soothing and laughing.
- Hold your baby in front of a mirror. Point out mommy’s nose and baby’s nose, etc.

Listen

- Listen to what your child is saying at your child’s eye level.
- Help your child use words to communicate feelings rather than pointing, crying or hitting.

Respect

- Introduce your baby to others as you would any person.
- Tell your baby what is about to happen (pick up, bathe, diaper, feed or put in car seat).

To see tips for every age and stage of development, go to www1.dshs.wa.gov/carechoices and click on Brain Net.

DSHS TOLL FREE

1-866-**ENDHARM**

1-866-363-4276

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

TTY-accessible

Call this number if you suspect that a child or vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected. The operator will connect you with the right DSHS office to make a report.

For more information about reporting abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, visit the DSHS web site at:

www1.dshs.wa.gov/geninfo/endharm.html

Maximizing our childrens’ brainpower

Recent research shows that a child’s earliest experiences and relationships make a huge difference in the way his/her brain develops. During the first three years of life, the brain is forming connections that will determine a lifetime of skills and potential. How parents and caregivers play and talk with infants and toddlers, plus the experiences they provide, can have a long-lasting impact on intelligence and character. Here are a few simple things you can do to help a child’s brain grow and thrive.

Warm, responsive care

Talk to me, hug me, respond to my needs. Smile at me and make me feel important and secure. Sensitive, predictable care is important for my healthy emotional development.

Loving touch

Cuddle me, cradle me, hold me close. Let me know that I am loved. Hugs help me learn to trust and handle stress now and when I’m grown.

Talk

I learn language from you. Even if I don’t understand you yet, my brain is making connections from what I hear you say. So while we’re together at home, in the store, in the car tell me what we’re doing and seeing. Your words help me learn.

Safe, healthy environment

Make sure I eat well, have regular check-ups with my doctor, and my immunizations are current. Provide a safe environment to explore.

Play

It’s how I discover the world. Lots of interaction and exploration help my brain develop connections that make learning easier. From peek-a-boo to playing with pots and pans – all these activities boost my brain power.

Music

Sing to me. Play music for me. Lullabies and simple rhymes can make me smarter. Music activates pathways in my brain I need to understand math and improve my thinking skills.

Reading and storytelling

Read books with lots of pictures to me. Don’t worry if I want the same book read over and over again. Repetition is how I learn. Read to me often and I will learn to love reading forever. Listening to stories develops my rich imagination.

Quality child care

Make sure my caregiver loves me and responds to my cues. Talking, playing, reading, and singing are the activities I need. Check that my surroundings are safe, bright and happy. Be sure my caregiver is well-trained and understands my developmental needs. Quality child care will help me thrive.

Teach limits with love

Limits make me feel safe and secure. They help me develop self-control when I get older. Studies show that how adults provide discipline is crucial to my development. Give me consistent limits that teach but never shake me.

Take care of yourself

When you are exhausted, preoccupied, irritable, or depressed, you will have a harder time meeting my needs. When you feel overwhelmed, take care of yourself. Reach out to family members, friends, neighbors, pediatricians, child care providers and others who can be helpful as I grow and learn.

“Every hug. Lullaby. Every kiss. Every peek-a-boo. Every word. Every touch. Every giggle. Every smile. Everything you do in these first three years becomes a part of them.”

- New York Times, April 22, 1997

Licensed Child Care You Have A Choice

“Sometimes it just makes sense to choose a licensed professional.”

Choosing the right child care can be one of the most difficult decisions for a parent.

Washington State law makes the job easier for parents by requiring professional licensing for individuals, organizations or enterprises that offer child care to the public. And our state licenses nearly 9,000 child care centers and care homes.

If you are looking for child care outside your home, it’s important to be sure the caregiver is properly licensed in our state.

The benefits of licensed child care include:

1. Criminal background checks on staff
2. Child care training
3. First aid training
4. CPR training
5. Health and safety checks of facilities

You do have a choice, and it’s easy to check. To learn about licensed child care, call the Child Care Resource and Referral Network at 800-446-1114 or go to **www.dshs.wa.gov/carechoices**.



Licensed
Child Care

You Have A Choice

Choosing Child Care *(Continued from front)*

Basic questions to ask care providers

- Is the provider licensed by the state to care for children?
- Is there space for your child?
- What are the hours of operation, vacation coverage?
- Are meals and snacks provided?
- Can the provider meet your child’s individual needs?

Feel free to ask about other things that matter to you as a parent.

Questions about quality of care

If you find a site that really interests you, consider asking these in-depth questions that touch on key indicators of child care quality:

- Ask to see the provider’s child care license. Providers that are licensed have met minimum standards to assure the safety of your child. A licensed provider should be happy to show you his or her license.
- How many children are there for each adult? The fewer the children for each adult, the better for your child.
- How many children are in the group your child will be in? The smaller the group, the better.
- What training and education has the caregiver received? Caregivers with special training and/or college degrees related to child care and development will be better able to help your child learn.
- How long have caregivers been at this site? Caregivers who come and go make it hard on your child.
- Is the caregiver accredited? Providers that are accredited have met voluntary standards that are higher than state licensing

requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association for Family Child Care are two of the largest organizations the accredit child care programs.

Make your Selection

- Make appointments to visit three or more sites before you choose one for your child.
- It’s important to check them all out in person.
- It’s also a good idea to talk to parents and to children in the care setting that you are considering for your child. Quality care providers should be happy to refer you to other parents who can share their opinions with you.
- When you’ve completed your visits and reviewed what’s important to you, you can make a selection knowing you’ve asked the right questions.
- For the licensing status of a provider, call 1-866-48-CHECK (1-866-482-4325).

Stay Involved

After your child is in care, remember to stay involved. Good ways to stay involved include:

- Meeting regularly with the care provider to ask questions;
- Offer to volunteer when needed, like on cleanup days or to fix broken toys;
- Be there for your child’s birthday;
- Visit your child to read a book aloud; and
- Join in special events, like field trips, career day, Black History Month, or other holidays.

Your visits and participation send a strong message. They tell your child and your child’s caregiver that you take your child’s activities and learning opportunities seriously.

Key facts about licensed child care in our state

There are nearly 9,000 licensed child care centers and homes in Washington State. Each type of care is subject to its own set of licensing rules, including minimum standards for health and safety. Licensed providers are required to post their licenses and they should be happy to show it to you, if it is not in plain sight. The license shows the numbers and ages of children the caregiver can serve.

TIP: No more than 12 children can be cared for in any family child care home under the supervision of two adults.

Who licenses caregivers and what is required of them?

Child care providers are professionals. Licensing of child care providers is overseen by the Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) within the Department of Social and Health Services. Individuals and business operators that want to be licensed child care providers must go through a licensing process. They also must follow rules that specify the requirements, including:

- who can run a child care business;
- who can work with children;
- skills and training caregivers must have;
- what and how food/formula can be prepared;
- whether/how medicines can be given; and
- other requirements.

When is a license not required?

Certain types of care are NOT regulated by DCCEL. They include legal nannies, baby-sitters, informal parent cooperatives, play groups, part-time preschools, and non-certified schools and parks and recreation programs.

Check it out!

The following points are a good way to measure the quality of a child care home or center.

Caregivers/Teachers

- ☐ Do the caregivers/teachers seem to really like children?
- ☐ Do the caregivers/teachers get down on each child’s level to speak to the child?
- ☐ Are the children greeted when they arrive?
- ☐ Are children’s needs quickly met even when things get busy?
- ☐ Are the caregivers/teachers trained in CPR, first aid, and early childhood education?
- ☐ Are the caregivers/teachers involved in continuing education programs?
- ☐ Does the program keep up with children’s changing interests?
- ☐ Will the caregivers/teachers always be ready to answer your questions?
- ☐ Will the caregivers/teachers tell you what your child is doing every day?
- ☐ Are parents’ ideas welcomed? Are there ways for you to get involved?
- ☐ Do the caregivers/teachers and children enjoy being together?
- ☐ Is there enough staff to serve the children? (Ask local experts about the best staff/child ratios for different age groups.)
- ☐ Are caregivers/teachers trained and experienced?
- ☐ Have the caregivers/teachers participated in early childhood development classes?

Setting

- ☐ Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?
- ☐ Is there a fenced-in outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment? Can the caregivers/teachers see the entire play area at all times?
- ☐ Are there different areas for resting, quiet play, and active play?
- ☐ Is there enough space for the children in all of these areas?

Activities

- ☐ Is there a daily balance of play time, story time, activity time, and nap time?
- ☐ Are the activities right for each age group?
- ☐ Are there enough toys and learning materials for the number of children?
- ☐ Are toys safe, clean, and within reach of the children?

In General

- ☐ Do you agree with the discipline rules?
- ☐ Do you hear the sounds of happy children?
- ☐ Are children comforted when needed?
- ☐ Is the program licensed or regulated?
- ☐ Are surprise visits by parents encouraged?
- ☐ Will you child be happy there?



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

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